

September 13, 2011

Testimony on SB 435-440 (Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care) for House Committee on Families, Children, and Seniors, Rep. Ken Kurtz, Chair

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding the hearing and for allowing me to speak.

The name is John Tuinstra. I have 9 children, 10 grand children, 33 years as a teacher, a collection of certificates and inventions and 3 college degrees, many years as a precinct delegate and several on the Executive Committee of our county's political party.

This morning, I speak as President of Citizens for Parental Rights. We have testified numerous times in Lansing, and over several years held hearings of our own with hundreds of parents, and many elected officials and candidates in attendance. We have originated several bills in recent years, seen a few of them enacted, and have a three-page list of legislative goals.

Though I have high regard for some of the sponsors of this package of bills, we do not support the passage of these bills, for several reasons. First and most important, is the track record of the destruction of families by Child Protective Services. We have heard complaints from hundreds of parents whose children have been taken and we have heard a pattern of complaints that are all too familiar. Think of the worst thing that could happen to good parents. It is not financial loss, or even the loss of health, but the loss of their children that is the most unthinkable. We have heard of and seen documentation accusing parents of such terrible things as too much laundry on the floor in front of the washing machine to not enough food in the refrigerator. I have documentation of parents failing to provide cable TV and a grandmother bribing her grandchild with a cookie. My friend Binta walked across 4 countries in Africa, came to the US thinking she had reached paradise, only to have her children taken from her after a short time in this country. My friends Karlene and Don, after a complaint of boys acting like typical boys often do on the school bus, had a nasty encounter with a sub-contractor of CPS. They lost thousands of dollars, lost two foster children they had planned to adopt, and after Karlene's blood pressure went up and she had a stroke, she is now in a wheel-chair and will probably never recover fully. My friend Judy had a private conversation with her husband recorded in which she stated her belief in his innocence, and was then bullied into "voluntarily" terminating her parental rights based on the Doctrine of Anticipatory Neglect. Think of the emotional trauma for children who are unjustly taken from their parents and placed with strangers. Several years ago, as I encountered these kinds of stories, I was bewildered and perplexed. But I also had a minor but unpleasant personal experience with CPS that led to some tragedy, cost, and great pain. Many people were telling me that the Federal money under Title IV of Social Security provided a strong financial incentive for CPS to take children from their parents and put them in foster care and then adopt them out. As I have researched this I am convinced this is true. Adoption incentive bonuses range from \$4000 to as high as \$8000 per child and recently, I am told, Michigan received millions in Federal bonuses for this. Please look at the Bill Analysis for SB 320 to see what CPS did with a child whose crime was drinking some Mike's hard lemonade. Please read the papers for the story of the SWAT team sent for MaryAnn Godboldo when she chose not to give her daughter a particular medication.

Second major reason for opposing these bills is financial. The Bill Analysis for this bill package shows the outlandish and unconscionable spending on foster care per child. This is the highest figure I have seen yet from a usually reliable source. Page 3, under Fiscal Impact, paragraph 3, last sentence states "The most recent estimate for foster care payments is \$24,500 per individual a year..." At these figures, my daughter and her husband should have a budget for 5 children and two adults, of \$173,000 per year. I assure they would be overjoyed to have a third of that amount.

If you compare the cost per child under government care to the cost per child in a normal self-sufficient family, it is a small fraction of the cost in a normal biological families. But what do we get for our tax

money. The statistics for children placed in foster care include higher rates of imprisonment, molestation and lower educational attainment. The number of child deaths in foster care is large enough that this Legislature has recently dealt with approximately a half dozen bills on child deaths in foster care.

And please look at the analysis for eligibility for young people to “voluntarily” receive some of this money. They must attend high school, or attend college, or attend a “program” designed to remove barriers to employment, or work part time, or claim a medical condition. I expect that with a bribe of several thousand per year for several years, some would likely find or even create a medical condition.

Now, some folks would be so short sided as to state that this bill package would actually bring money into our state from the Federal government. But where does the Federal government get money. Look at your check stub, it comes from the taxpayers. And aren't we all in this together as a nation? And isn't there a national debt of well over 14 trillion, and a declining credit rating for the Federal government. Can we keep up this overspending? And isn't it time someone had the courage and the vision to say it is time for this to change?

So to paraphrase, what we are doing as a nation is taking money from the citizens to pay the CPS to take children from their parents and put them into a failing child welfare system, producing children less able to pay the higher debt we are creating for them. If you'll excuse me for being a little coarse, what these bills do is put a bounty of \$75,000 on the heads of each one of our minor children and grandchildren.

It seems to me there are a few options that are honorable and courageous for this committee. You can give this package a negative recommendation today. Or you can delay a decision and hold more hearings. Typically the public receives only a few days notice on these hearings. I would be happy to invite injured parents to another hearing such as the ones you have scheduled for September 22 and October 6 or some other date in the near future. When we have given adequate notice we have been able to bring in more speakers that we can usually handle. We have recorded over 40 television programs, and would probably be able to provide more recorded testimony that you would care to hear.

I love my country and my state, and I feel called to support families. I respect those bill sponsors that I know personally, but we already have a very hazardous and counterproductive funding structure in Child Protection. Other methods such as flat grants have been helpful. Or, you could do as our board has done and ask the Congress to gradually defund Title IV support for this. But please do not expand wasteful spending, and a this financial incentive which would promote more unnecessary removal of children from fit parents.

Please do not recommend this bill for passage by the full House. Thank You.